

MEMO #4: IMPROVING EMPLOYEE / LABOR RELATIONS

Abstract: *Federal labor unions play a vital role in the effective management of the federal workforce. As such, it is critical that the President and Congress take proactive steps to improve and maintain the Federal Government's relationship with labor representatives, especially in light of the ongoing challenges associated with reform efforts in human resource management.*

Background

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 28% of the Federal Government's 3.5 million full and part-time employees are members of a union. Unions represent federal workers who are both members and non-members. In total, just over 31% of federal employees are represented in union negotiations and the two largest unions representing federal employees are the American Federation of Government Employees (600,000 covered employees) and the National Treasury Employees Union (150,000 covered employees).

Given restrictions on negotiating issues related to pay and benefits, federal unions have historically focused their collective bargaining efforts on employee working conditions. However, the on-going political discussion concerning federal employee pay and benefits, coupled with ongoing federal employee pay freezes, has served to chill overall labor/management relations at the federal level. Still, the cooperation of federal employee unions will be key to initiating meaningful and comprehensive reform efforts affecting all facets of the federal human resource management system.

A recent effort of the Obama Administration was the creation of the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations (NCFLMR). The 17-member council is comprised of management representatives from across the Federal Government and is co-chaired by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Seven union officials, five agency representatives, the chair of the Federal Labor Relations Authority, and the presidents of the Senior Executives Association and the Federal Managers Association make up the remainder of the Council. The Council provides for overall coordinative efforts concerning federal labor-management relations.

Recommended Actions:

Given the need for full labor cooperation in implementing critical human resource management reforms, we recommend the following actions:

- **Union cooperation should be sought in implementing comprehensive human resource management reform efforts.** Reform cannot be successfully implemented without the cooperation of federal employee unions.
- **The National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations (NCFLMR) is an excellent avenue to increase overall coordinative efforts between federal management and employee unions – its use should be encouraged.** The continued use of NCFLMR should be encouraged, as should the use of labor/management councils at the agency level.
- **Federal management, unions, and other interested groups should begin a coordinated effort to improve the image of the federal workforce.** Such an effort will enhance recruitment and selection efforts as well as dispel inaccurate perceptions of the federal workforce. The NCFLMR should coordinate these efforts in cooperation with the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA), the Partnership for Public Service, and other public service organizations.